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## Keewatin Wallhangings

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# Background

The Arctic, contrary to what most "southerners" imagine, is a land of dynamic balances and contrasts. It remains one of the last places on our shrinking planet where one can still sense in the grand expanses of sky and land the domination of the timeless forces of nature; a place where one feels that man and his ideas have yet to dominate and control the environment. It is, at once, a land of an awesome and yet gentle beauty.

The Inuit have lived in the Arctic for several thousands of years, surviving generation after generation on their patience, ingenuity and skill. In earlier times the survival demands were the all-consuming objective of the life of the family and the community. People followed the changing migrations and patterns of the caribou, fish and other forms of wildlife. They were able to survive because of their ability to live in a precarious balance between their own needs and the harsh, severe, and often unpredictable climate of the north. Even in the present day, while most Inuit people have had to abandon many of their traditional ways for more modern ones, the precariousness of their survival remains.

A dramatic development in the history of the Inuit people of the Kewatin interior began with the famines of the late 50's and early 60's. With the sudden and dramatic

decline of the caribou herds, many Inuit people died from starvation, others found themselves settled in small communities where they could obtain their survival needs. The Inuit were then faced with a new challenge even more formidable than the harsh climate. They now had to come to terms with economic survival in an economy whose centers and values were more closely linked to the industrialized south.

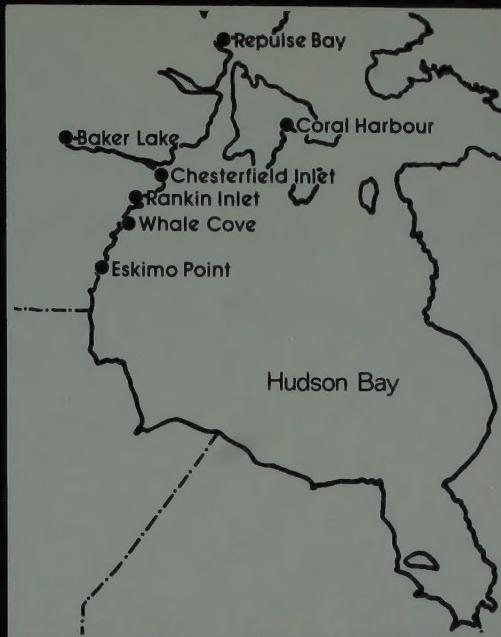
One of the legacies of generations of northern survival is the development of perception, creativity, and manual skills. One of the traditional areas of manual skill was in the putting together of various types of wearing apparel. It is to be emphasized that Inuit people have developed these skills because they are historically related to survival. The design and construction of a good parka was more a matter of necessity than it was a matter of esthetics. Nevertheless, the designs and patterns of intricate inlays of cloth and fur remain as some of the finest examples of garment design to be found among any of the world's peoples.

In the mid to late 60's many government financed arts and crafts projects were set up concentrating on various ways Inuit artists could exploit and develop their talents. At this time the people in the sewing centres experimented with making cloth pictures

with scraps left after clothing had been cut out.

In the spring of '71 enlarged and improved facilities were opened in Baker Lake and eventually in other communities. The factory system was rejected and a decision was made to emphasize the hand sewing skills and design ability which for generations were applied to the creation of functional items.

One can see as well the presence of ingenuity, imagination, a sophisticated sense of space and color, and a unique approach to intuition and the subject matter of Northern life. As art objects they are vital and direct. Many will find a refreshing honesty, even a sense of humor in these wallhangings. The approach one finds in these works offers a hint to a philosophy and an understanding of the trials and tribulations of life that are a unique part of a unique culture. They stand among the best art objects being produced in the world today.



The Keewatin



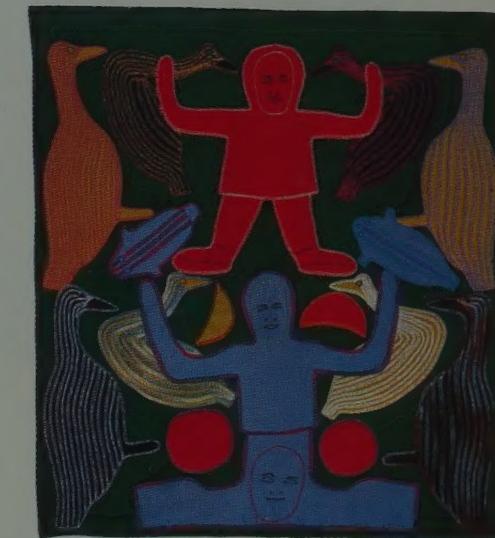
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Baker Lake



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Baker Lake



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Marlon Tuuluq      Baker Lake



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